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Friday, 18 March 2016, 11 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The President: I now invite the attention of the General Assembly to paragraph 21 of resolution 70/140, of 17 December 2015, which calls for a special meeting in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Assembly will recall that, at its 80th plenary meeting, held on 17 December 2015, the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 70. In order to proceed on the item on today's agenda, it will be necessary to reopen the Assembly's consideration in order to hold the special meeting.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of agenda item 70?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 70 (*continued*)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The President: The General Assembly will now commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and hold a debate on the state of racial discrimination worldwide. All are welcome to this commemorative event. In 1966, the General Assembly decided that 21 March would be the day when the world paused each year to reflect on the state of racial discrimination in our world. The Assembly did so because it was on that day in 1960 that 69 unarmed and peaceful protestors were killed by the apartheid regime's police in Sharpeville, South Africa.

This year we are reflecting in particular on the progress made during the 15 years since the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and it is fair to say that the picture is very mixed. On the whole, we have made progress, including by eliminating much direct discrimination on the basis of race, colour and ethnicity. But it is also true that the ignorance, prejudice and fear that are often at the root of racial discrimination continue to run deep right across the world. Millions of people continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which have assumed contemporary forms and manifestations. Disturbingly, in the past 12 months we have also seen a rise in divisive political rhetoric and xenophobia in some parts of the world that targets refugees and migrants in particular.

Democratic societies will of course always face tensions in terms of managing the interests of different groups, but tolerance, cultural diversity, responsible political leadership and inclusive governance are fundamental to protecting human rights and ensuring that those tensions do not spill over into violence and conflict. And while individuals, civil society, the United Nations and others all have important roles

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to play in countering racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, ultimately each and every Member State bears the primary responsibility for their prevention and elimination. In particular, we must do more to live up to the commitments outlined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. That requires targeted and immediate action, but it must also be sustained over time.

Indeed, from South Africa to the United States of America, it is clear that hard-fought victories against oppressive systems are not yet enough to overcome a legacy of discrimination. Eradicating institutional bias, and changing both attitudes and outcomes, is hard. It takes time and strong commitment. The 2015-2024 International Decade for People of African Descent has also reminded us of the need to be vigilant and stay the course on these issues. It seeks to address many of the lingering legacies of one of the most far-reaching forms of racism and racial discrimination the world has ever seen. And I am very pleased that we are joined today by our keynote speaker, Mr. Ahmed Reid, a member of the Human Rights Council's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

In conclusion, let us remember all those who have suffered from racism over the years. And let us honour them by working together and taking concrete action to prevent further cases of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

I now invite the Secretary-General to make a statement.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the General Assembly in marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We should recall that the date of its annual observance is the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre of peaceful demonstrators in South Africa in 1960. I am encouraged by how far we have come since that tragedy, but we still have a long way to go in our work for equality for all.

For this year's observance, we are commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Adopted by consensus at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, these texts remain the most comprehensive framework we have for international, regional and national action against racism. The international community acknowledged in Durban that no country could claim to be free of racism, and that is still true today.

We have undoubtedly come a long way in ensuring equal rights and non-discrimination. Member States have adopted or amended legislation to guard against racial discrimination. The General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent, which will continue through the year 2024. Civil-society organizations worldwide working on racism are increasingly active and vocal.

But the persistence of racism indicates that we have not yet done enough. I am deeply alarmed by the surge of intolerance, racist views and hate-driven violence around the world. Racial profiling and violence against certain communities is on the rise. Economic hardship and political opportunism are triggering increased hostility against minorities. That is being manifested most directly in anti-refugee, anti-migrant and, in particular, anti-Muslim bigotry, attacks and violence. Extreme right-wing political parties are fomenting divisiveness and dangerous myths. Even once-centrist parties have hardened their views; once-moderate countries are seeing xenophobia increase sharply and once-sober voices have exploited fears in a dangerous echo of the darkest chapters of the past century. All of that increases the risk of societal fracturing, instability and conflict.

In such tumultuous times, we must stand up for the rights and dignity of all, and for diversity and pluralism. We must speak out against anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and other forms of hatred. An assault on one minority community is an attack on all. I am also concerned that the political will that existed 15 years ago is under threat. The collective determination that enabled Durban's far-reaching agreement is being undermined by political expediency. The shared commitment to the universal values of the Charter of the United Nations is being tested. We must keep foremost in our minds the countless victims of racial discrimination. By implementing the Durban agreements, we can lift up not only those who suffer most profoundly but humankind as a whole. Non-discrimination and equality are the very foundation of our universal human-rights system. Let us unite to ensure dignity, justice and development for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

In accordance with resolution 70/140, I now invite Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to make a statement.

Mr. Al Hussein (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights): Fifteen years ago in Durban, the world came together to work to end racism. Never before had leaders sought to develop a comprehensive global strategy to address the roots of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. People of African and Asian descent, migrants, Roma, indigenous peoples and minorities; people with HIV/AIDS; and women, who face multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination and exclusion — all those millions of victims were the focus of the Durban Conference.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome document also addressed the profound injustice of religious intolerance — including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, both of which are, shockingly increasing in many countries. This, the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, is an opportunity to consider how far we have come. But, given the disgraceful persistence of discrimination across the globe, it must also be an occasion to renew our commitment to raising new generations free of prejudice and bigotry by taking further action. Unquestionably, there has been progress over the past 15 years. Many national action plans and anti-discrimination laws have been adopted or upgraded to comply with Durban recommendations. Those frameworks have assisted Governments to push back discrimination at the national level, and have enabled countless people to fight for equality. A dynamic network of civil-society actors evolved in preparation for the World Conference, and today those organizations form a strong and impressive array of active voices.

As the Durban Declaration states clearly, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

> "are a crime against humanity and should always have been so" (*A/CONF.189/12, para. 13*).

Their legacy of violence, fear, deprivation and searing prejudice continues to be borne by people of African descent. Historically and in the present day, people of African descent are, and have always been, major contributors to development and the prosperity of their societies — but still today, they are frequently deprived of equal access to opportunities and services. I count the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent and the adoption of its programme of activities among the achievements of the post-Durban process.

But there have also been challenges. Most alarming among them is the resurgence of racial discrimination and xenophobia in Europe and elsewhere. Migrants are becoming scapegoats for deeper problems. Violence targets foreigners and others based on their real or perceived race, colour, ethnic origin or religion. The archaic injustice of prejudice still stalks through modern life, generating daily humiliation and oppression for individuals, deepening divisions between communities and holding back millions of people from realizing their rights. Now more than ever, States must focus their attention on fulfilling their obligation to protect the most vulnerable sectors in society. We must be vigilant to ensure that the stress of factors such as rising unemployment is not displaced into racist harassment, abuse, discrimination and attacks. We must not condone the manipulation of such sentiments for political gain, or their manifestation in official policies.

Millions of people around the world continue to suffer the injustice and indignity of racial discrimination every day. It is urgent that States honour the commitments made at Durban and their obligations under international human rights law, particularly the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which has been ratified by 178 States. Human rights are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. They are universal because everyone is born with and possesses the same rights. They are indivisible and interdependent because all rights — political, civil, social, cultural and economic — are equal in importance and none can be fully enjoyed without the others. These rights apply to all of us equally, and when the human rights of one group are denied, that damages the dignity and equality of us all.

The President: I thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights for his statement.

I should now like to consult members with a view to inviting Mr. Ahmed Reid, member of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent of the Human Rights Council, to make a statement at this meeting in accordance with paragraph 21 of resolution 70/140.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Reid to make his statement?

It was so decided.

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now invite Mr. Reid to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Reid (Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent): It is a great honour to be here today. Let me express my gratitude to the President of the General Assembly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and my colleagues in the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for the opportunity to present this year's keynote address under the theme "Challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — 15 years after".

Ever since the establishment of the United Nations, the noble principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights has been the cornerstone on which the international human rights system is based. The rights of all human beings should be protected without distinction as to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sex, language or any other status. It was the strict adherence to this principle of equality and non-discrimination that led to worldwide revulsion and condemnation over the racially motivated killings of 69 unarmed men and women in Sharpeville, South Africa, on 21 March 1960, which led the United Nations, in 1966, to commemorate 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of its commemoration by the United Nations, and the fifteenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, let us reflect on the achievements to date and the goals yet to be attained to make real our collective commitment to the principle of non-discrimination, and our pledge to combat racial discrimination.

In 2013, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in general recommendation No. 35, stated,

> "The prevalence of racist hate speech in all regions of the world continues to represent a significant contemporary challenge for human rights." (*CERD/C/GC/35, para. 46*)

Today we are confronted with the painful reality that racism, racial discrimination, Afrophobia, xenophobia and related intolerance continue to pervade every corner of the global landscape. Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady rise in far-right populist sentiments worldwide, and in the number of political parties with their brand of racism and xenophobia. The global financial crisis and, more recently, the movement of a large number of refugees have resulted in growing incidents of racial discrimination and xenophobia, further resulting in a strong anti-immigration backlash, the scapegoating of migrants, racial prejudices, stereotypes and violence.

Racism and racial discrimination pervade all aspects of our lives — from segregated schools to gentrified neighbourhoods where people of African descent and other minorities are forced out of certain communities and into disadvantaged ones. I am a living example of racial profiling, feared and deemed suspicious because of the colour of my skin. I have been called the N-word. I have been told to go back home. I have had my passport unduly scrutinized by airline personnel. I have been harassed and humiliated by customs and immigration officials on my travels. And I have been followed around in supermarkets and department stores. The odds are great that I will have these experiences again and again and again.

The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was an important step in the fight to combat those manifestations of racism. The staging of the Conference was an acknowledgement that racism and related forms of intolerance were global problems that required global solutions. The Declaration that emerged from the Conference outlined the sources and contemporary consequences of racism, the victims of racism and, more important, strategies, by way of a Programme of Action to achieve racial equality.

The Durban Conference was a significant achievement in comprehensively outlining a strategy to address historical wrongs and injustices. The strategy is embodied in the Declaration, which reasserted the principles of equality and non-discrimination as core human rights and assigns the primary responsibility for combating racism and related intolerance to States, while also calling for the active involvement of international and non-governmental organizations, political parties, national human rights institutions, the private sector, the media and civil society. As a mechanism to address discrimination, the Declaration called upon States to develop comprehensive national action plans to tackle, inter alia, the administration of justice and to create competent national bodies to

adequately investigate allegations of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In examining the strategies put in place to achieve full and effective equality, a number of achievements attained through the implementation of the Programme of Action are worthy of mention. For example, an increasing number of States have established equality bodies supported by appropriate legislation and policies to combat racial discrimination. However, the implementation of the law also requires that States fulfil their responsibility as duty bearers and that civil society become actively involved. Member States have been collecting disaggregated data on people of African descent, which is important for enabling Governments to institute targeted programmes to eliminate racial discrimination.

Another achievement was the setting up of new mechanisms to address racism and other related issues. One such mechanism is the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. The Working Group, of which I am a member, was established in 2002 to study the impact of racial discrimination and the challenges faced by people of African descent living in the diaspora and to make recommendations for its elimination. Another achievement was the General Assembly's adoption of the Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which recognizes that people of African descent represent a distinctive group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.

The Programme of Activities for the Decade outlines several impact-oriented actions for States in three areas — recognition, justice and development — to improve the overall human rights situation of people of African descent around the world. Stakeholders must use the opportunity afforded by the Decade and give high priority to programmes and projects specifically tailored to combating racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent.

While we can point to some progress having been made since the adoption of the Durban Declaration, the rate of implementation of the commitments made at the Conference to improve the lives of people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples has not been equal across States, and many challenges persist that further impede implementation. As the Working Group has monitored the human rights situation of people of African descent and undertaken country-level fact-finding missions, it has been a cause of great concern to see that indicators in the fields of education, employment, health, housing and infant, child and maternal mortality and life expectancy still show disadvantage in people of African descent and vast disparities between them and the rest of the population.

The colonial history, the legacy of enslavement, racial subordination and segregation, and racial inequality remain a serious challenge in many countries, as there has been no real commitment by States to reparations or to truth and reconciliation for people of African descent. This is another challenge we face in attaining the objectives of the Durban Declaration. In its provisions for effective remedies, the Declaration notes,

> "The Conference recognizes the need to develop programmes for the social and economic development of these societies and the [d]iaspora, within the framework of a new partnership based on the spirit of solidarity and mutual respect". (*A/CONF.189/12, para. 158*)

Some of the areas identified were debt relief, promotion of foreign direct investment, market access, technology transfer and investment in health infrastructure which, to date, have not been addressed in their entirety.

There is a clear connection between poverty and racism. It is not a coincidence that in countries that have had a history of trade in enslaved Africans the demographic structure is such that the poorest population group is disproportionately composed of racial or ethnic minorities. Confronted with systemic discrimination and invisibility, people of African descent face an uphill battle in claiming their rights as rights holders, thus perpetuating multi-generational poverty. As the development world embraces the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (resolution 70/1), which is grounded in international human rights standards and has the imperative of equality and non-discrimination at its core, the Agenda's framework will help countries integrate human rights into their national priorities.

The United Nations system and the Member States bear a tremendous responsibility in having to ensure that, in the interests of peace and justice, future generations may live in a world free of the scourge of racial discrimination and its manifestations. The commitments made in the Durban Declaration will be

only words if Member States fail to adopt them in their own policies and practices and take positive actions to create equal opportunities for victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Their value depends wholly on our courage, will and determination to honour them and give them meaning.

As we aim to transform the world in which we live through sustainable and equitable development, let us commit to ensuring that no one is left behind.

The President: I thank Mr. Reid for his statement.

Mr. Manongi (Tanzania): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of African States on the agenda item before us.

At the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 8 September 2001, the international community adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which was designed to combat those phenomena. Today not only do we commemorate the adoption of those texts, we also reaffirm and renew our firm global political will to their full and effective implementation, as well as that of the outcome document of the 2009 Review Conference.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action still constitute the most comprehensive, action-oriented global framework to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. This commemoration provides a timely opportunity to assess the progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the Conference after 15 years. It also offers us an opportunity to identify the obstacles and challenges encountered and to find the solutions they require.

The African Group welcomes the progress made at the national, regional and international levels in conformity with the obligations and commitments of Durban. We are encouraged by those Governments that have adopted landmark and progressive legislative and administrative measures to effectively combat racism and racial discrimination; to protect the rights of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and racial, national, ethnic and linguistic minorities; and to combat incitement to hatred based on religion, belief or colour. We recognize that colonialism, apartheid and political injustice have led to many of those forms of intolerance. We are also conscious of the fact that Africans, people of African descent and Asian ethnicities continue to be victims of those scourges and their consequences.

The persistence of those structures and practices have been among the factors that contribute to enduring social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today. The African Group still commends the General Assembly's adoption of the International Decade for People of African Descent in 2015. Its theme, "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development", seeks to promote respect for and the protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of people of African descent. We are of the view that Governments should reinforce protection against all forms of intolerance by ensuring that all persons have access to effective and adequate remedies and that they enjoy the right to seek, from competent national tribunals and other national institutions, just and adequate reparation and satisfaction for any damage as a result of such discrimination.

We continue to witness the discriminatory hardships the people of African descent continue to face across the globe. We commend international partnerships for promoting measures designed to enhance the full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights in respect of their diverse heritage and culture. The diaspora being the sixth region of the African Union, the African Union will continue to seize opportunities that strengthen bridges across the diaspora.

We appeal to the Secretary-General to include in his report to the seventy-first session of the General Assembly information on progress with regard to the revitalization of the trust fund established to ensure implementation of the activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent and its programme of activities. We appeal to the United Nations family and individuals to contribute generously to the trust fund. We request the Secretary-General to undertake appropriate contacts and initiatives to encourage such contributions.

The African Group recognizes the positive contribution that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression of the media and other new information technologies, including the Internet, can make to the fight against all forms of intolerance. However, we are concerned about the misuse of new information technologies as a platform for promoting intolerance as well as perpetuating other forms of slavery, including

child pornography and trafficking in persons. We are of the view that Internet providers should develop and abide by codes of conduct to prevent trafficking and to protect victims of trafficking, strengthen measures to prevent trafficking in women and girls and provide for their healing and rehabilitation, and address issues of international displacement. We urge the international community to support the implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in 2010. We look forward to the holding of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on trafficking in persons in October 2017.

The African Group believes that the right to quality education to all citizens contributes to more inclusive societies, promotes harmonious relations among nations and individuals and can foster mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity and the human rights of all. The Group reiterates its belief that justice requires that victims of human rights violations arising from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance be ensured access to justice and effective and appropriate protection and remedies.

The Group welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to erect a permanent memorial on the premises of the United Nations to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We appreciate the supportive activities intended to achieve that noble objective.

In conclusion, the Group condemns discrimination on any basis. We reaffirm our commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration. Collectively, we must accelerate our efforts to effectively implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in order to sustain the momentum on the gains achieved at the Durban Conference. It is imperative that another world conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance be convened to build synergies on the assessed progress and new partnerships in the implementation of the targets and indicators of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. It is time to act now, if we truly want to achieve a meaningful positive change to curb the scourge.

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): It is indeed an honour for me to speak on behalf of the States Members of the Asia-Pacific Group at this important event.

We wish to begin by thanking the President for convening this plenary meeting to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 2142 (XXI), adopted on 26 October 1966. We would also like to thank Mr. Ahmed Reid for his statement earlier, as well as to commend the work of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, which has contributed to the global fight against racial discrimination. The theme for this year's event focuses on the state of racial discrimination worldwide almost 15 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

In September 2001, at the historic World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, we gathered in South Africa to call on the peoples of the world to engage in the global fight against racial prejudices with the utmost determination and perseverance. The message from the World Conference was undeniably clear that the struggle against racism is a struggle for human rights, dignity and the eradication of poverty. One and a half decades later, we must now ask ourselves whether our joint efforts to address the situation of the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance identified in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action have truly made significant progress.

Racism persists despite the efforts of many groups and many nations. This annual commemoration therefore shows that the international community should maintain the determination and perseverance needed in the struggle to eliminate racial discrimination. This event gives us the opportunity to look at our achievements and emerging challenges. It is clear that much remains to be done. This event reminds us of the historic tragedies of colonialism, slavery and war, and the valuable lessons that we painfully learned. It also serves as an alert that, in today's world, racial discrimination can still become a cause of social unrest and violence. Nowadays, we continue to find various forms of racial discrimination, through social practices and discriminatory laws and regulations, that lead to poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion, and affect the lives and livelihoods of a number of communities throughout the world.

It is therefore essential to reaffirm the political will to strengthen our concerted efforts in the elimination of racial discrimination. During this observation, let

us be reminded that we need to translate this political will into concrete and more vigorous actions at the national, regional and international levels to effectively implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The involvement of all stakeholders, particularly civil society, the private sector and the media is also unquestionably imperative in this fight. The effective promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance to tackle racial discrimination does not and cannot rest solely on the shoulders of Governments.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, allow me to once again proclaim our commitment and strong determination to ensure that the fight against all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance remains a high priority in our respective countries and throughout the world.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

The Group of Eastern European States welcomes the meeting of the General Assembly in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is being held under the theme "Challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — 15 years after".

Today's meeting is an opportunity to renew our collective commitment to the total elimination of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and to the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. On this occasion, we pay tribute to the victims of racism, as well as to leaders and ordinary people around the world who have fought for human equality.

Over the past 15 years, efforts have been undertaken and some progress has been achieved. Yet, today it is clear that the ideals behind the calls for societies free from racism and discrimination are still to be attained. As the most recent report of the Secretary-General (A/70/367) shows, this phenomenon has not been eradicated, and no country can claim to be free from it.

The Group of Eastern European States remains concerned about the persistence of the scourge of racism and discrimination. This is a global challenge and we must be united to fight it. The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination remains the basis for all efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, and each State has the primary responsibility for the fight against this scourge. In this respect, we would like to reiterate the fundamental importance of ratifying and fully implementing the Convention, which should be a priority for all countries, and express our wish for its early universal ratification.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan), Vice-President, took the chair.

It is also important to further support efforts designed to promote intercultural dialogue, tolerance and respect for diversity. Education is a determining factor in the promotion and protection of the values of justice and equity, which are essential to prevent and combat the spread of intolerance. Continued cooperation between the United Nations and other relevant international and regional organizations to develop educational programmes aimed at countering all forms of discrimination in order to ensure respect for the dignity of all human beings and to enhance mutual understanding among all cultures and civilizations is of critical importance.

The Group of Eastern European States remains committed to the fight against racism and racial discrimination and will continue to make its contribution to this noble cause.

Mr. Webson (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) on this occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The countries of GRULAC recognize both the challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly globalized world in relation to the struggles to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It is for this reason that the States members of GRULAC reiterate their unwavering commitment to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. This year's theme, "Challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — 15 years after", provides an opportunity for the international community and Member States to review policies both within our respective countries and internationally with a view to looking at and closing gaps and persistent racial barriers.

A decade and a half after the adoption of the Declaration, we have seen some measurable progress achieved by international communities in addressing

racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. However, decisive elements of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are recurring in today's world in various forms often associated with the consequences of challenging socioeconomic conditions, limited opportunities, unemployment and poverty. The key elements in the fight against intolerance depend on an inclusive society in which all are given equal opportunities, the principles of human rights are taught and upheld, and a greater awareness and remembrance of past events, mistakes and atrocities are made known.

My delegation would be remiss if we did not mention one of the most significant achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in its assertion that slavery and the slave trade are crimes against humanity. GRULAC countries are pleased with the decision taken by the General Assembly to erect the Permanent Memorial at the United Nations to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We encourage Member States, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and individuals to support that and other initiatives, which will serve to strengthen the message of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Member States of our region are as unique and diverse as the world has ever seen. We are multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual in our populations and the makeup of peoples. With our exceptional diversity come greater opportunities for our peoples. We recognize that encouraging the full participation and contribution of all our peoples is a significant route to fulfilling our own development goals. In that respect, the countries of our region firmly believe that sustainable development cannot be achieved except where it is achieved for all people, regardless of racial distinction. As our leaders gathered here this past year and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), the States members of GRULAC reaffirmed their determination to promoting the full inclusion of all races in our societies and to achieving a region and world free of racial discrimination. We recognize that no region or country is immune to prejudices. Accordingly, in celebrating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the GRULAC region sees that as important.

The International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 and the Latin American and Caribbean People of African Descent Action Plan are two important programmes for our region. Both provide the basis for taking concrete measures to address the expansive effects of racism and transformation on people of African descent. The coronation of those programmes is our seal to ensuring that such atrocities should never happen again. The passage of the landmark International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is one such seal. In order to continue moving forward, as Member States we must move beyond eloquent speeches and continue to define concrete areas in eliminating the scourge of discrimination and in achieving political, economic and social inclusion.

In closing, I must remind everyone of the need for Member States to continue to raise awareness of the harmful effects of racism and the commitment of our leadership in promoting racial justice, understanding, respect, equality and diversity.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Exactly 50 years ago, one year after the adoption of the first international human rights treaty — the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination — the General Assembly proclaimed this important Day. But at very moment when nations adopted that fundamental document, Nelson Mandela was languishing in confinement in South Africa, which is evidence — as if evidence were needed — that our progress in the normative sphere sometimes outpaces current events.

We would also be wrong to believe that by eliminating a segregationist regime such as apartheid, we rid ourselves of racism once and for all. Accordingly, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination allows us to regularly reaffirm our commitment to establishing a just world, based on the conviction that all human beings are equal in their dignity and rights, and to remaining vigilant to the resurgence of racial discrimination, which can take many forms. We honour the memory of all victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination remains as relevant as it has ever been. Its nearly universal ratification

has invested it with an unquestionable authority in the area. The independent experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination contribute to compliance by following up its implementation and by assisting States in developing policies against racism and discrimination. At the same time, we acknowledge other initiatives to combat racism in all its forms, such as the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of 2001. We acknowledge the importance of prevention and concerted action, especially in the area of education, and we recognize that the emphasis on practical and concrete measures can contribute to the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance.

Fifty years after the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and 15 years after the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, it is undeniable that progress has been made, but it is equally undeniable that many challenges remain. On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, let us learn from history and from previous mistakes. Let us not make the mistake of believing that history cannot repeat itself. Let us all remain vigilant!

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for convening this commemorative meeting to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Let me also thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, His Excellency Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; and keynote speaker Mr. Ahmed Reid for their insightful statements. We also express our appreciation to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for its untiring and immense efforts to overcome racial discrimination.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, as a cornerstone of global human rights architecture, is highly relevant and applicable in addressing contemporary challenges. In the environment of protracted armed conflicts and the resulting refugee crises, it is essential to prioritize the struggle against racial discrimination and xenophobia. A human-rights-based approach is needed to mitigate negative crisis-related hardships through the integration of refugees and to avoid heightening tensions in society through segregation and discrimination.

In view of the global war against terrorism, a scourge spilling over continents and State borders, our delegation considers it critical to act in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Law enforcement and the provision of security should go along with respect for and the protection of human rights.

Racist attitudes and hate speech have also been deployed via social media and Internet platforms. Our delegation deems it crucial to appeal to civil society and business in the quest to prevent the Internet from being used as a vehicle for spreading hostile and volatile attitudes on the basis of nationality, religion, ethnicity or race. The only way to surmount discrimination and related intolerance is to combine the efforts of international and national institutions, civil society and business. The international community has the tools and experience needed to tackle discrimination and intolerance, and we call for strong political will and financial support to bridge the gap between normative documents and their practical implementation.

Since independence, Kazakhstan has declared to the whole world its policy of peace, trust and cooperation, based on inter-ethnic and interreligious peace and harmony. As President Nursultan Nazarbayev has said, for us the principle of tolerance is not only a norm of political culture, but also one of the key principles of statehood, which we decisively support and strengthen. Ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity is our precious wealth. We have managed to turn the historically inherited multireligious society into our strategic advantage.

As a State party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, my country is deeply committed to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Kazakhstan is among the 57 States that have signed the optional declaration recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to consider complaints from individuals or groups who claim that their rights have been violated. We uphold our commitments under the Convention through a robust framework of laws and programmes enforced at the national and local levels.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan enshrines the principle of equality and expressly prohibits

discrimination in any form. The various ethnic groups, along with ethnic Kazakhs, are engaged in nation-building and enjoy the highest civil and social status, not as national minorities, but as citizens with full civil and political rights. Kazakhstan has established an effective system that ensures interaction and equal partnership between the State and civil society, the main mechanism of which is the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, a unique constitutional authority on issues of inter-ethnic and cultural harmony. The country has a doctrine of national unity to strengthen inter-ethnic mutual respect.

The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions has made an important contribution to the consolidation of inter-ethnic and interreligious accord in Kazakhstan. That forum has received international recognition as an effective dialogue platform for the promotion of peace and harmony on the planet. Kazakhstan's model of inter-ethnic and interreligious tolerance has been highly commended by the United Nations and regional organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, the Commonwealth of Independent States and others.

Kazakhstan believes that the United Nations must continue to address the issues of race, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, and thereby uphold human dignity for all. Kazakhstan, reaffirming its commitment to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, intends to continue to make every effort for the benefit of dialogue among civilizations and always stands ready to combat racism and related intolerance at all levels and throughout the world, as well as to honour and preserve the memory of millions of lives taken tragically.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): South Africa welcomes the convening of this commemorative event to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The year 2016 marks 15 years after South Africa hosted the landmark and historic World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which remains the only instructive outcome document of a major conference prescribing measures and remedies for the elimination of all the scourges of racism, as well as the atonement of historical injustices.

In the period following the World Conference, many achievements have been registered, particularly in Geneva in the creation of the Durban follow-up mechanisms, which ensured that the anti-racism agenda is profiled and visible in the United Nations human rights system. In addition to these mechanisms, the following key achievements need to be highlighted.

First, we underscore the significant proclamation and subsequent launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent in the diaspora for 2015-2024. It will be recalled that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action categorized Africans and people of African descent as the grouping that suffered the most in terms of historical injustices emanating primarily from the legacies of slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, and marked the momentous occasion in United Nations history where slavery and the slave trade were recognized as a crime against humanity, which in itself is another major achievement.

Secondly, we stress the commendable work undertaken by the follow-up mechanisms to Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — namely, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, in developing the comprehensive Programme of Action for the Decade of People of African Descent and their collaborative effort, together with the intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, on the development of the programme of activities for the implementation of the Decade.

Thirdly, the unveiling of the monument of Ark of Return in memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade and to honour the contribution they made, as well as the inclusion of the World Conference of 2001 in the 20 major achievements of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, are further significant steps taken by the United Nations in its efforts towards the acknowledgement of the terrible suffering faced by the victims.

Regrettably, 15 years on there remains a lot that still needs to be addressed to restore human dignity and equality to the millions of victims who suffered and continue to suffer the terrible scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which continue to haunt the world today. Despite the efforts made, we have not yet attained a number of

key objectives that require the utmost attention of the international community. There remains an imperative need to end contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which was the rationale behind convening the World Conference in 2001. This would be done by filling the gaps that exist within international human rights law, through the creation of new normative standards, namely, the elaboration of standards complementary to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which addresses xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and incitement to hatred. The perennial lack of progress in this area has continued to negatively affect our fight in combating racism and racial discrimination on these grounds.

The establishment of a racial equality index on the situation of people of African descent in terms of their socioeconomic development is still to be realized. That will serve as an important tool for identifying the key causes and manifestations of racial discrimination. It is regrettable that there remain many Member States that have reservations regarding key articles of the International Convention, in particular article 4. My delegation wishes to put on record that these reservations continue to negate the essence of the instrument and defeats its core objectives and purposes.

Furthermore, South Africa looks forward to the establishment of the permanent forum on people of Africa descent and to positive steps taken towards the reopening and revitalizing of the Trust Fund for the Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. We believe that this will provide for the successful implementation of the activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent, the forum and beyond.

In closing, this commemorative event and the fifteenth anniversary of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action present an opportune moment for the world to unite and strengthen its efforts towards combating and eradicating all forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which have for far too long affected the victims. As we remember the Sharpeville massacre of 69 unarmed people, on 21 March 1960 in South Africa, we call on nations of the world to use the opportunity of this International Day to restore human dignity.

Mr. Menkveld (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Today, we mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We commemorate all lives worldwide of people who fought against racial discrimination because of their desire for democracy and equal human rights.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action provide us with a series of tools to tackle the scourge of racism. We must all work to give practical effect at the national, regional and international levels to the commitments we undertook in Durban in 2001. Let me reiterate, in this regard, the strong commitment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Everyone living and residing in the Kingdom of the Netherlands is protected by law from discrimination; the ban on discrimination is enshrined in our Constitution.

The Netherlands recognizes that a vigorous approach to preventing and combating all forms and manifestations of intolerance and racism is needed. This includes not only effective legal responses, but also preventive measures that promote social inclusion, acceptance and equality for all members of society. The Dutch Government works hard to combat discrimination in collaboration with the business community, civil-society organizations and individuals, as discrimination is a shared concern and imposes a shared responsibility.

Last year, the Netherlands Government adopted a national guidance note for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent. Dutch activities during the Decade will serve to step up measures to tackle racism in the Netherlands in line with the new national interministerial action plan against discrimination, which is currently being developed.

Racial discrimination is unacceptable. We have to strive for nothing less than full elimination.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I join the international community in reaffirming our firm commitment to combat all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Bangladesh would like to reiterate its principled and uncompromising stand against racial discrimination, which is aptly manifested in our Constitution, as well as in our entire legal and administrative framework. Our Constitution prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of race, religion, caste or creed, gender or place of birth. We promote international cooperation among and between nations irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, culture and civilization.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Government maintain a zero-tolerance policy of all forms of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization. Our flagship General Assembly resolution in the United Nations on a culture of peace, which receives overwhelming support from the comity of nations every year, is a testimony to our commitment towards the principle of inclusion and peaceful coexistence of diverse groups. We believe in unity in diversity. Our adherence to a culture of pluralism, communal harmony, democracy, freedom, liberalism, peace and development has long been recognized by the international community.

This year, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination commemorates in particular the challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. As we mark this auspicious date, 15 years after the adoption of those landmark documents, we can see that people all over the world still face discrimination, suppression and oppression based on their racial, religious or ethnic identity. We are dismayed at the fact that hundreds of millions of human beings, including migrants and refugees, still suffer today from racism, discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion. Clearly, what was agreed to in Durban still needs to be put into practice.

We call for stronger international cooperation in eliminating racial discrimination from the world. We reiterate the importance of ratifying and fully implementing the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is the universal foundation for efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism. As a State party to the Convention and an active member of the Human Rights Council, we support the Convention's comprehensive implementation.

All of us must also show strong political resolve and make further efforts to implement the recommendations of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) also recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies based on respect for the human rights of all. We must redouble our efforts to resolve all disputes that foment intolerance, discrimination and hatred. I hope the day is not far off when our collective efforts will succeed in creating a society based on tolerance, inclusion, justice, equality, equity and human rights.

Mr. Umetaliev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): Racial, ethnic, religious and cultural differences make our world more diverse. Kyrgyzstan supports the consolidation of the international community's efforts in the fight against the negative phenomena of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. In that regard, we are particularly concerned about the growing incidence of racially motivated violence and increasingly frequent demonstrations of aggression in the public sphere, many of them in response to the mass migrations that have occurred in the past year as a result of events in the Middle East and Africa.

Racism, discrimination and intolerance are a global problem that should concern us all. These violations represent one of the most significant problems in the area of human rights today. We should also acknowledge that universal human rights norms and standards, which definitely include those of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, are the best guiding principles for protecting vulnerable people against racism and intolerance. We measure the value of international obligations in such areas by their implementation at the national level.

Our Constitution prohibits discrimination against anyone in Kyrgyzstan for ethnic, religious or any other reasons. We have adopted programmes designed to ensure ethnic minorities' political participation and social integration, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, we believe that it is essential to increase our State structures' responsibility for preventing conflicts. In that regard, the Government has created a State agency for local Government and inter-ethnic relations, in which a monitoring centre for analysis and early warning of conflicts occupies a leading position. In areas that are densely populated by different ethnic groups, we have established social centres dealing with issues of ethnic relations. Regional

administrations have set up advisory committees that include local leaders of the various ethnic groups, along with activists and religious leaders.

As an active member of the Human Rights Council, Kyrgyzstan calls on all Member States to fulfil their international obligations in this area, regardless of potential negative attitudes to refugees and migrants from sectors of their societies, and to do everything possible to change people's mindsets and show them that the world is diverse and everyone in it is unique.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We support the emphasis that the United Nations places on issues related to combating racism and racial discrimination. Unfortunately, even today we have not yet vanquished ethnic and religious intolerance, xenophobia and inter-ethnic tensions, and their hostages are national minorities, whose representatives frequently encounter different forms of discrimination. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action remain the benchmark for States working to create programmes for combating such phenomena, and today's meeting represents a good opportunity for the international community to affirm its principled rejection of racism and intolerance in any form. The decisions taken in Durban were not easily arrived at, but they have enabled many of us to hope that racism can be conquered.

The Russian Federation consistently champions the promotion and protection of human rights without any distinction based on race, colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion or language. Our country is home to representatives of more than 180 ethnic groups, which makes our development of an inter-ethnic dialogue particularly important. A major component of that process consists of painstaking efforts at the national level aimed at creating and educating a tolerant society based on the principles of equality and cultural diversity.

One of our national priorities in combating racism, including in its contemporary forms, is the preservation of the memory of the suffering and losses experienced during the Second World War, the legacy of Nazism's criminal ideology, and the establishment of appropriate educational programmes. Last year's celebration of victory in the Second World War once again reminded the international community of the countless miseries that notions of racial superiority have brought upon humankind, and once again highlighted the significance of the Nuremberg trials and their key influence on the establishment of an international human rights regime. Sadly, even today there are cases where people still turn a blind eye to the followers of Nazism.

It is vital to ensure that we erect a sturdy barrier to the spread of ideas of intolerance and racial, national or religious superiority. Equitable international cooperation, mutual respect, the preservation of cultural diversity and open, constructive dialogue are the recipe for eradicating and preventing racism and racial discrimination. Guided by these objectives, our delegation, along with a growing number of the interregional sponsors, presents for adoption by the General Assembly an annual draft resolution on combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We believe firmly that its adoption makes a real contribution to eradicating such shameful phenomena, and we hope to see broad support for that initiative in the General Assembly at its forthcoming seventy-first session.

Eradicating racism and xenophobia demands political will and consistent work on the part of the entire international community. We call for a united effort to achieve this still-relevant goal.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 70?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.